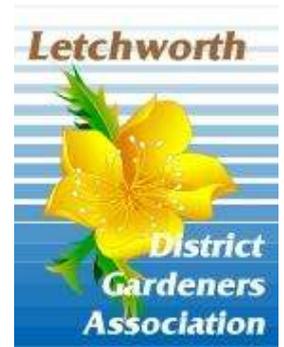


Letchworth District Gardeners Association

Affiliated to the BFS, NDS, NSPS, NVS, RHS
President: Mr Graham Tapp



Annual Report 2017

Chairman's Report

I really feel that 2017 was a turning point for the Association. Your committee have worked tirelessly all year behind the scenes to ensure the success of the Association. To ensure that we got more publicity we put on a small exhibit at various events, notably the Letchworth and Hitchin festivals as well as the Grow it Yourself event in Letchworth. We chose 'Wildlife' for our theme and the stand was much admired. We have not shied away from spending more money to refurbish the Trading Store in order to make it a more enjoyable experience. Yes we do enjoy taking your money and have made it even easier now by investing in a card reader! Costs have been kept to a minimum, mainly due to the decorating skills and dedication of John Brookbanks with a little help from other members. By financing two large storage containers which are in the compound, it has freed up the store and makes it easier to move around. Hopefully you enjoy visiting the restored environment and will continue to do so especially now that you will be able to help yourself to a cuppa, most welcome during the cold winter months.

The monthly meetings have been a great success with interesting speakers throughout the year. It is a pity that more members don't take advantage of these as they do take a lot of organising. With three most enjoyable outings during the year what more could you ask for.

Shows are the third arm of the Association and despite all the challenges thrown at us these go from strength to strength and hopefully will continue to do so. If you haven't already taken the plunge and exhibited in the past and would like to try then please do speak to one of the committee members, help is always at hand. They always provide an enjoyable afternoon out with the exhibits to look at, delicious tea, coffee and cakes to be had as well as demonstrations to watch.

Our monthly coffee mornings on the first Wednesday of the month,

10.00am at Tapps Garden Centre continue to give members the opportunity to meet socially as well as to enjoy the delicious refreshments served in the tea room, yes we do like to spoil ourselves. We can always go and find something to do in the garden after lunch to combat the guilt of having that slice of cake when we know we should be watching the calories!

As always I am most grateful for the support given to me by our President Graham Tapp and members of the committee and for the hard work that they all put in to help run the Association. I give my thanks to them and also to you the members for your continuing support.

M. Hersee

Speaker, outings and social report – Myra Smith

The AGM in February marked the start of our year followed by a Sausage Sizzle Social with Quiz. This was an event with 59 attendees and many requests to hold it again. In April John Cullan our Dahlia judge, gave us a very enlightening talk on the judging and growing of Dahlias. We had a good insight into what is required if you wish to be selected to open your garden for the NGS when the County Organiser visited us in May. June saw our first outing of the year to Capel Manor, a most interesting visit with such a lot to see. Also in June Andrew Sankey took us to Chatsworth which was most informative. The subject of our next talk was “The Reluctant Gardener” which was very entertaining. Whilst the trip to Hyde Hall Flower Show was good, Wisley is still the favourite. Our August visit to Pioneer Nursery at Willian proved very popular and we learnt about air plants and their introduction into the UK. George Lockwood was next and he spoke on Organic Gardening, an excellent speaker, informative and entertaining. Anne Luder, our guide at Capel Manor came to us and spoke on “Why Garden” a very interesting, knowledgeable lady. A fascinating insight to growing “Giant Vegetables” was given by Sherie Plumb. The trip to Anglesey Abbey Winter Light was a good outing, cold but enjoyable and it stayed dry.

Thank you all for your help and in particular thank you Roz who sets up the hall every month and just quietly gets on with it. She is also Queen of the Kitchen Sink! Our thanks to Thelma for her past speaker bookings, a hard act to follow.

My personal disappointment has been the rather low membership attendance at the meetings. Out of 400 members we can only muster, on average, about 40 which is only 10% !!

Show Report - Paul Heydon

Our two shows were again excellent but I did have a major problem when two of my judges pulled out at short notice. Fortunately, I was able to find replacements who did a first class job. With both shows we would like to see more children taking part but we are lucky that one school has about a dozen pupils that like to take part.

There were our demonstrations in both shows that were well received, in a different room, which I hope all appreciated as it allowed more space for having your cup of tea and cake.

I do not want to pick out any one item as everything was outstanding. I am very jealous as I cannot match your standard, one day perhaps. The number of exhibits at the Autumn Show was matching our all-time high. I would like to thank Myra and her gang for doing sterling work supplying us with the teas and cakes. Jo for running the plant sales and Andrew for preparing the schedule. All the other unnamed helpers that helped set up and clear away and do all those other duties that make the show run so smoothly. Special thanks to Roz, without her help I do not think I could cope.

Trading Report – Peter Faulkner

The year in question has, by and large, been a good one. In contrast to 2016 potato sales were very good. Several varieties sold out very quickly and we sold almost everything in good time. I say almost because when we were preparing the store for painting, see later, we found a very dead rat surrounded by 30 potatoes, variety unknown!

Spring sown onion sets and shallots also sold better and the same amounts have been ordered for the forthcoming season. The order for autumn sets was also reduced and we sold out.

Composts and fertilizers also sold well, especially Jack's Magic. We had three pallets (165 bags) delivered and sold them all by May or June so this year we will be taking delivery of five pallets (275 bags). We had to switch to Vitax for our sand and grit and discovered that the grit was not much coarser than the sand. We have managed to improve for 2018 but the best we can do 4mm. Most fertilizers will be 'own brand' but we will also be stocking Organic Farm Yard Manure in place of the fibrous 6X/Groworganic chicken manure. Some of you will know already that we have started stocking Strulch, a chopped straw with added iron etc. to act as a mulch.

Changes are still being made to the sundries. Tumbleweed is no longer available so we have cleared out our wholesaler's stock 12 x 500ml bottles. Garotta is no longer made but other similar products are. Strike rooting hormone has been banned.

Seeds continue to sell but there were some issues about quality and presentation so we have switched to King's Seeds. More varieties will be stocked including a few more flowers. The only drawback is that the Association will still get discount but it will not be available to individual members.

Those of you who have visited the store recently will have noticed that the whole of the inside has been repaired and painted, including the shelves. My deputy, John Brookbanks, did much of the work and we owe him a tremendous debt of gratitude. You will also notice that we have two secure storage containers in the compound.

I have been doing the job of Trading Secretary for 16+ years and have enjoyed it immensely. Tempus fugit, however, and it is time to change drivers, John Brookbanks has already done much of the ordering etc. and he will be taking over completely after this meeting. I will still be around and am prepared to offer John all the help he may - or may not - require.

My eternal thanks to all those members who have helped out this year. I hope that most if not all of you will be prepared to continue.

Membership Secretary's Report - Jo Schurch

Membership has increased slightly this year and we ended the season with 402 members. Since Christmas the renewals have been coming in thick and fast. I post about a dozen cards back daily so the posties have obviously done their job, thank you.

Treasurer's Report – Amanda Collinson

Although we made a loss this year of £1295, the increase in sales by 14% has reduced the impact on our profit and loss. The net loss also reflects a significant increase in depreciation charge with the purchase of two storage containers for stock.

Cash at bank has fallen with the continuing move to upgrade the store and the purchase of the containers. However, we are seeing increased income from people attending the lectures and shows so net cost of these has gone down. There has also been a small increase (6%) in memberships.

Website & Newsletter Editor's Report – Andrew Dear

The website continues to be the place to go when you want current information about the Association. The look and feel of the site remains the same but pages are being updated on an almost daily basis, so don't just visit once, keep returning. The more people visiting: the better our ranking with the search engines.

We made great improvements to our monthly updates since we started using the MailChimp emailing service this time last year. I hope you find what we send interesting and informative; please let us know if there is anything you would like to see included. We are also reaching more members now than ever before, but it's still not everyone; if don't get the updates but would like to, then let me know & I'll get you added to the list.

I hope you have been enjoying this year's editions of the Compost Heap quarterly newsletter. I've have introduced a few new features along the way and have tried to include lots of photos. If you have a particular interest or ideas that you want to air let me know even if it's only sowing the seed which I can grow on so to speak. We have also been using MailChimp for the Compost Heap delivery and have noticed from the feedback that quite often people open the email but don't click on the links to open Compost Heap; I'm not sure why this is. When you follow the link it opens a file from our website in your browser, it should be perfectly safe from an internet security point of view. Let's see if we can increase the readership this year, if you like it, tell your friends.